

2015 Budget Engagement

Overview

The City of Edmonton engaged members of the public in the fall and early winter of 2014 on the proposed 2015 Operating Budget, 2015-18 Capital Budget and 2015 Utilities Budgets.

The public engagement consists of an education and awareness component and a feedback component.

The communications objectives were to:

- Improve public access to budget info
- Improve transparency & understanding
- Create opportunities for people to learn more, if desired
- Add opportunities for public input

Key information provided to citizens focused on three primary concepts:

- Edmontonians enjoy good value every day from their municipal services, programs and infrastructure.
- An important part of Budget 2015 is meeting the commitments that have been made to renew and grow our city.
- A fundamental value of the City of Edmonton is that we are always improving operations and finding more efficient ways to serve Edmontonians.

Web-based tools were used to convey information and compile input to maximize potential reach to Edmontonians while minimizing use of tax dollars.



Building Awareness

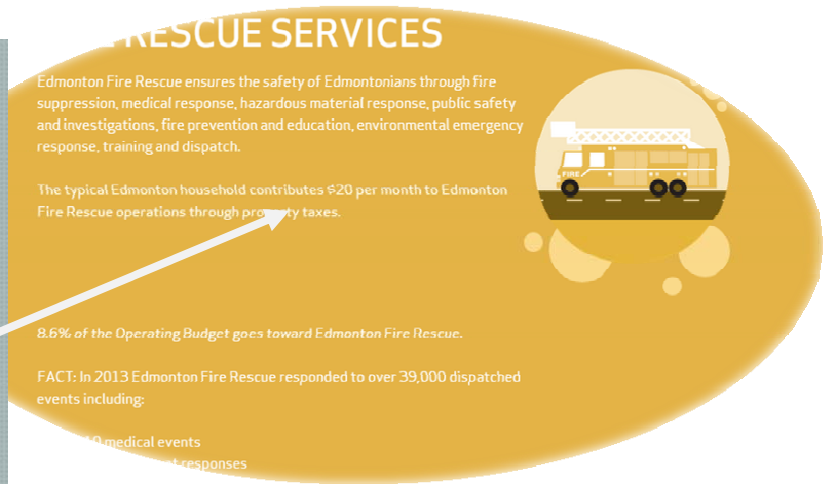
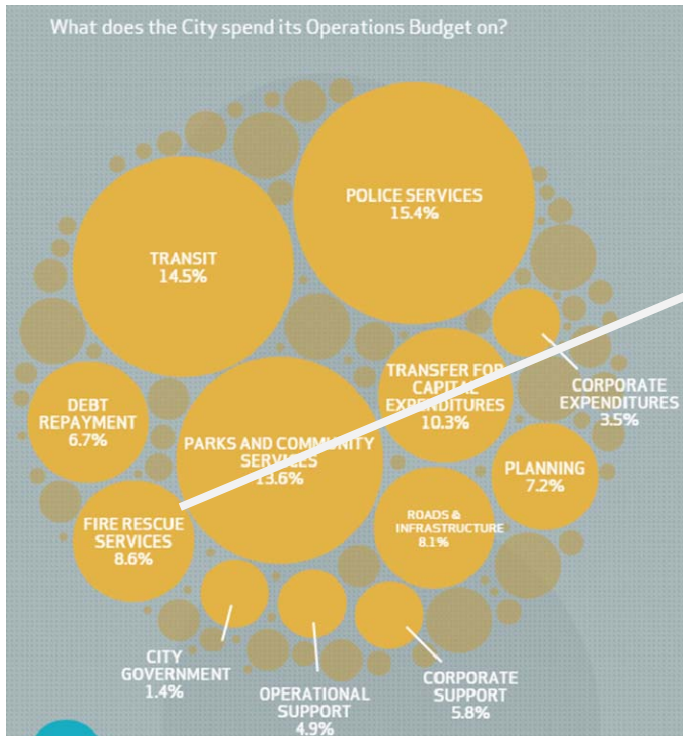
The extensive budget documentation that City Council reviews was also provided online at www.edmonton.ca to ensure a completely transparent process.

The City also created a dedicated website – <http://yegcitybudget.ca> – to focus public attention on the budget and the services Edmontonians receive for taxes and fees.

The website was supported by a primer document called “A Great City At Work – Understanding Edmonton’s Budget”.

Both the website and document present the Budget in an accessible format, to help explain complex issues such as debt, and the differences between operating and capital budget financing.





On Nov. 13, we invited Edmontonians to ask any questions about the Budget and services, on a forum called Reddit:

www.reddit.com/r/Edmonton

The idea was to go where people are discussing topical issues for Edmonton, rather than asking them to only come to our websites.

CFO Lorna Rosen participated on the social networking forum where she invited residents to “Ask Me Anything” about the budget.



↑ [-] [manybellidown](#) [score hidden] 2 hours ago
 What does the budget process actually look like 'behind the scenes'? It sort of suddenly appears on the public radar in the fall when we get asked for our input in the fall, but there must be a lot of preparation involved before that. Who all is involved? At what point(s) in the process is Council or its committees involved?

permatalk

↑ [-] [teresa](#) [9] [score hidden] 2 hours ago
 City staff from every department are involved in the budget process. While it gets the most attention in the fall, we actually take the foundational work on budget to Council in the spring. That is discussed in public, and is based on what are the big changes that we actually envision between the current year budget and the budget that we are planning. From there, there is a significant amount of work that's done on individual programs and services to ensure that they are handled efficiently, while still meeting the needs of the public. Issues arising through public interaction, concerns expressed by citizens, and needs identified by stakeholders are discussed throughout the year at Council Committees and City Council, and are referred to the budget process if funding decisions are involved.

permatalk parent

Increasing Understanding

Budget engagement focused on increasing understanding through three main vehicles:

- YEGcityBudget.ca interactive site
- Online “Ask Me Anything” about Budget
- Edmonton Insight Community survey

For example, the dedicated budget website helps show proportions of spending in visually dynamic ways, and it allows people to drill deeper into any area to learn about the service, key stats and even how much a typical Edmonton homeowner spends on that service.

This website continued to evolve as deliberations progressed, with a focus on topics and key questions about the budget and easy to understand answers.

Public Input

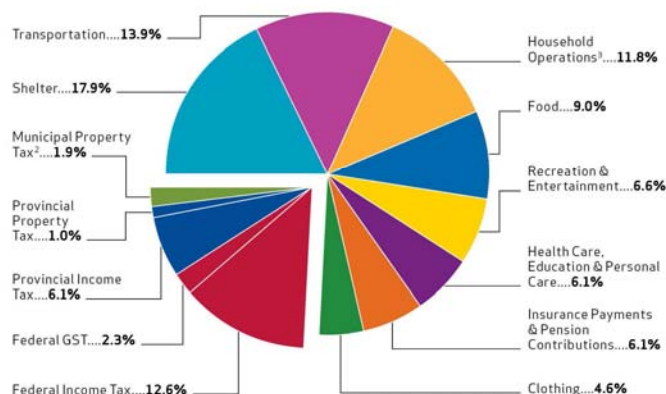
When it comes to public input, the Budget is essentially a consolidation of the work Council has been doing over the past 12 months. Therefore, the vast bulk of input that goes into the budget comes from Edmontonians through year on programs at committee, through email and calls to Councillors and the Mayor, 311, and the hundreds of hours of public meetings and online consultation on individual projects.

City Council held a public hearing on the 2015 Budget on November 24, 2014.

In addition, the City invited over 1,800 members of the Edmonton Insight Community online panel to learn about tradeoffs in the budget process, and the wide range of City of Edmonton services.

- The online consultation tool helps participants understand City Council's process to balance the budget.
- The tool also helps the City understand how Edmontonians feel about the range of civic services and what are their priorities for spending tax dollars.
- This feedback is to be used by Administration for developing business plans in 2015 for all departments
- The feedback is extremely beneficial to gauging awareness and understanding of the range of services and programs, which helps the City improve communications efforts.

MONTHLY AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SPENDING¹



The engagement through the Edmonton Insight Community demonstrated a commitment to providing more information about the complex budgets, while compiling feedback.

Neighbourhood Renewal [Learn more](#)

Reconstruction or upgrades of roads, sidewalks and street lights in mature communities, and other infrastructure revitalization in older neighbourhoods. There are over 150 neighbourhoods that require renewal. This Program will undertake improvements (either overlay, preventive maintenance or total reconstruction) all neighbourhoods within 30 years. Of these, 100 need to be reconstructed. Between 2011 and 2018, 34 neighbourhoods are scheduled for reconstruction, with about six completed every year. The program is funded through a dedicated tax, the Provincial Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI), and local improvement levy. Reconstruction schedules and details are available at Edmonton.ca A photo gallery of recent Neighbourhood Renewal projects is [available here](#).



In your opinion, what could be done to improve the Neighbourhood Renewal Program?

Edmonton Insight Community Budget Survey

Methodology

An online interactive tool was available November 4 to November 19, 2014. A total of 1,944 members of the Edmonton Insight Community online panel were invited to participate in the interactive budget-balancing tool and to provide feedback on a number of questions.

The survey tool allowed residents to learn about budget revenue sources, distribution of expenditures, and amount of household spending used for taxes.

The tool allowed users to simulate adding or decreasing funding to a list of 16 tax-supported areas and the two utilities. Participants could access more information, web content and even videos on many of the service areas.

The tool displayed the amount of their taxes per month going to each service area, based on the actual assessed value of their property or the default value for a typical Edmonton home.

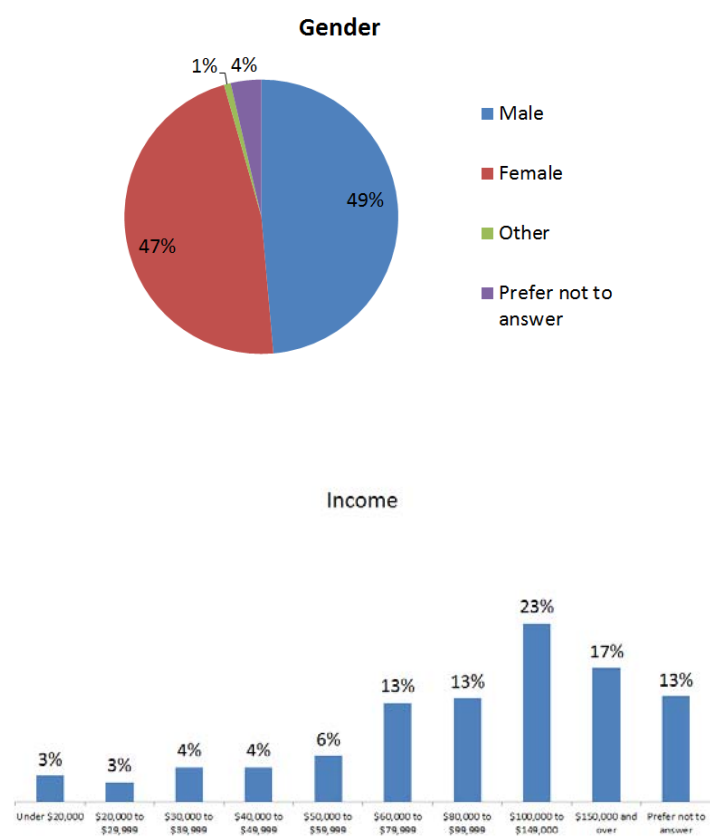
The online tool was complex, reflecting the many aspects of the Operating and Capital Budgets, and involving both exploring information as well as providing input. The average time participants spent on the site and completing the survey was 24 minutes.

From the Edmonton Insight Community, 767 members reviewed the online tool, and provided submissions. An additional 73 Edmontonians provided feedback through an open survey link, for **a total of 840 participants** who completed submissions. With the average time spent on the survey, the feedback would represent the equivalent of 336 hours of presentations at public hearings.

As a non-random online survey, a margin of error is not reported. If a probability sample had been used results for a sample of 840 are statistically accurate ± 3.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. This is based on the 2014

Edmonton Census data of 754,127 that are 15 years of age or older.

Demographics



The City continues to monitor the membership demographics of the Edmonton Insight Community, and focuses recruitment efforts on areas in Edmonton’s population that under-represented in the community, based on Census data.

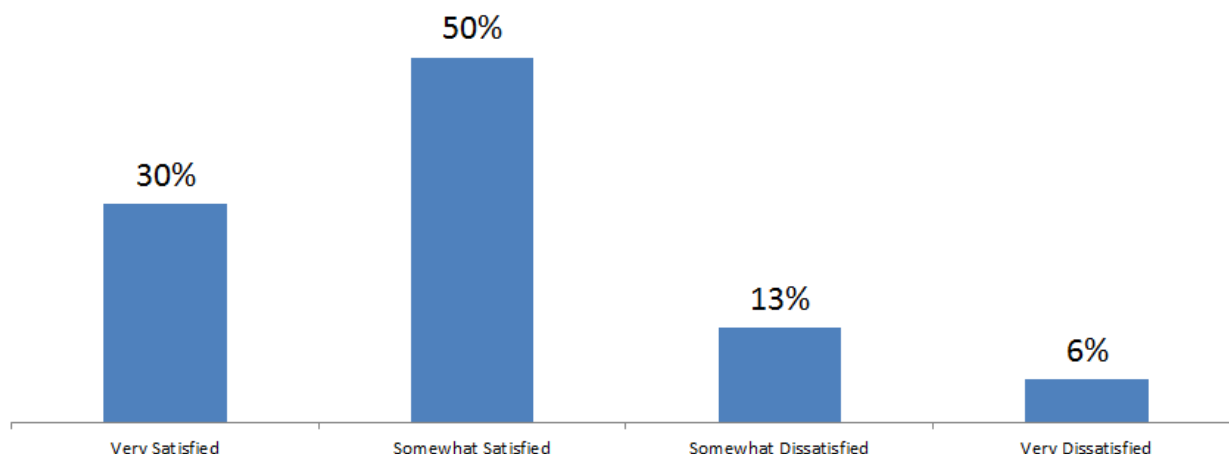
2015 Budget Survey Results

The Budget Survey consisted of 7 main sections:

- Overall Satisfaction, opinions about fiscal management and value for taxesPage 5
- Capital Budget, infrastructure priorities and debtPage 9
- Operating Budget, service priorities and methods to balance the budgetPage 12
- Increase/Decrease/Maintain spending in 18 service categoriesPage 15
- Feedback on ways to improve the 18 service categories (Appendix)Page 35
- Revenue, household costs and taxes compared with other orders of governmentPage 36
- Information about the budgetPage 38

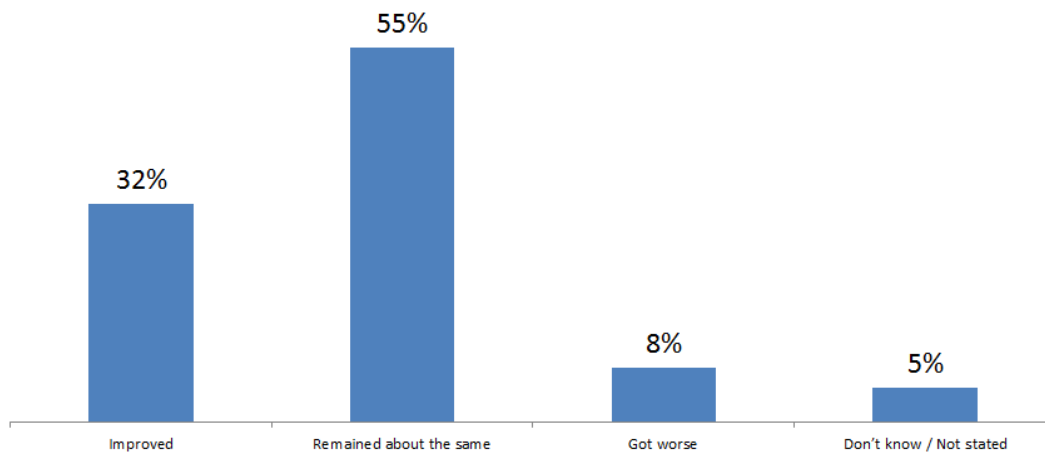
Satisfaction with civic services

Generally speaking, how would you rate your overall level of satisfaction with the quality of services provided by the City of Edmonton?



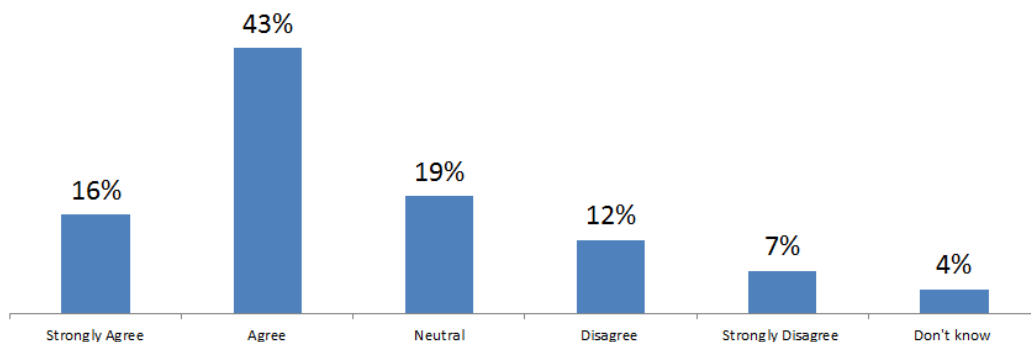
Change in quality?

Thinking back over the last 12 months, would you say that the quality of service provided by the City of Edmonton has ...?



Fiscally Responsible?

The City of Edmonton is fiscally responsible in the management of your tax dollars.



Value for Taxes

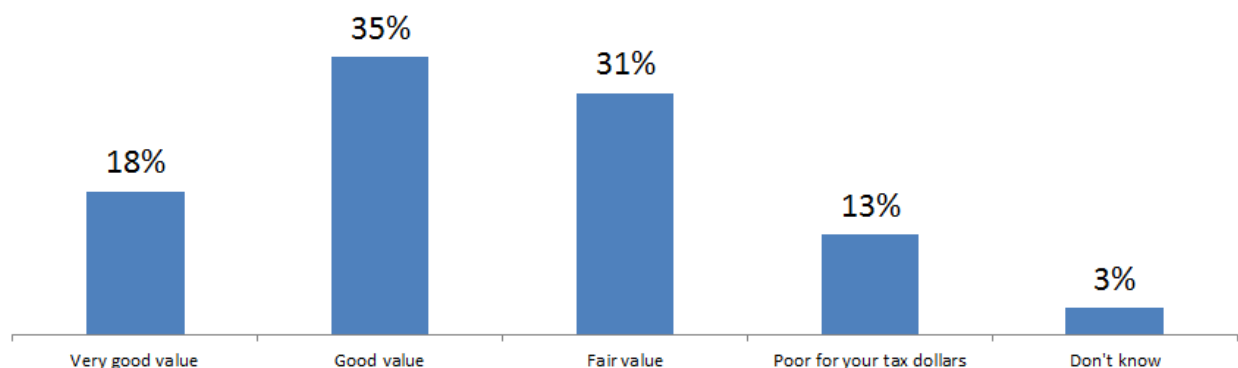
Participants were provided the following information:

With the proposed 2015 Budget, a typical Edmonton home, valued at \$374,500, would see the annual property tax that goes to the City would be \$2,184 or about \$182 per month. That's after 35% of each homeowner's property taxes goes to the Province for education tax.

City taxes amount to about 1.9% of a typical household's total costs, while home operations for things such as Internet, TV Cable, furnishings and pet supplies add up to 11.8%. Food alone amounts to 9%.

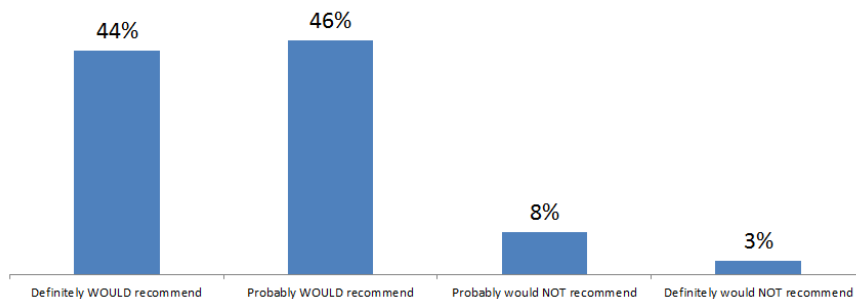
The proposed 2015 Budget would provide all services for about \$6 per day in municipal property taxes.

Thinking about the portion of property taxes that pay for municipal services, would you say you receive...?

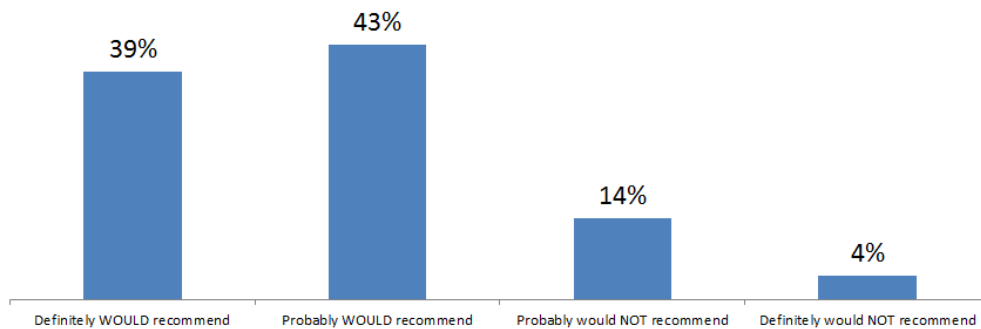


Recommend Edmonton?

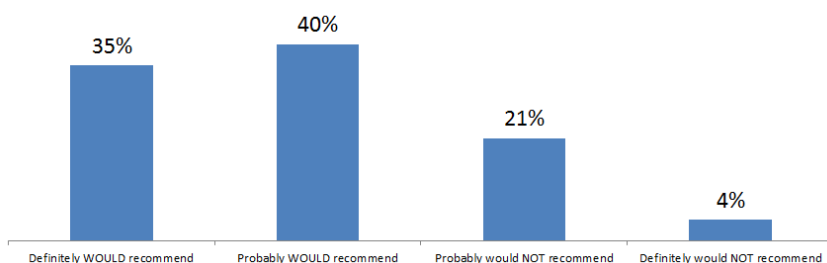
Would you recommend Edmonton as a place to work?



Would you recommend Edmonton as a place to live?



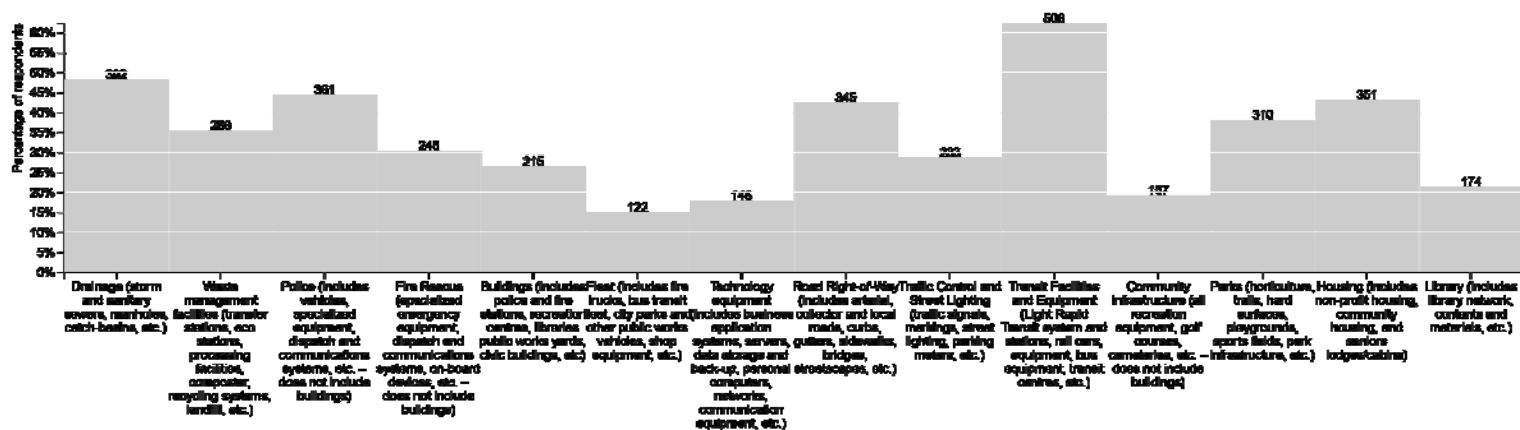
Would you recommend Edmonton as a place to visit?



Top Infrastructure Priorities

If you had to suggest priorities for infrastructure spending, what would be your top most important categories?

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Transit Facil/Equip | 2. Drainage | 3. Police |
| 4. Housing | 5. Roads | 6. Parks |



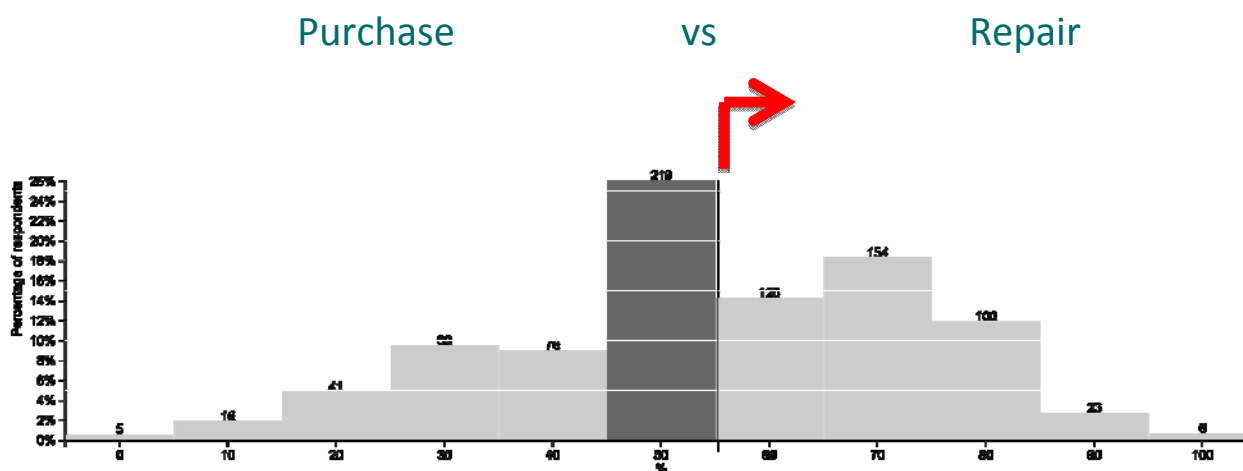
Use of Debt by Residents

Respondents who said they use debt in **their home** to pay for certain things, identified the most common items for which debt is used:



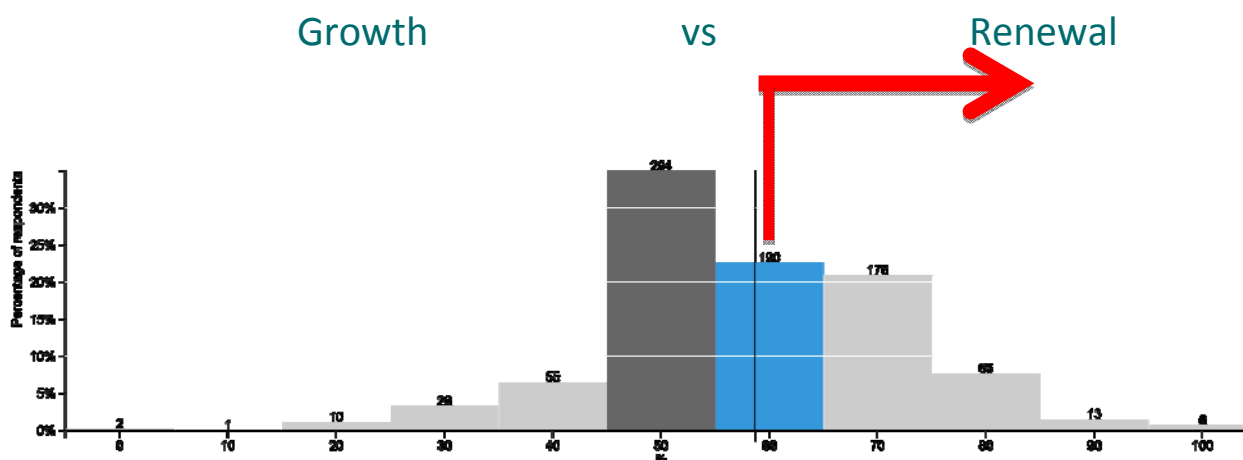
Use of Debt by Residents

In your own home, what would you estimate is the balance between spending on purchases of new things (new furnishings, equipment, appliances, technology, clothes) and spending on repairs and maintenance (fixing roof, painting or renovating, repairing clothes or appliances, landscaping, etc.)?



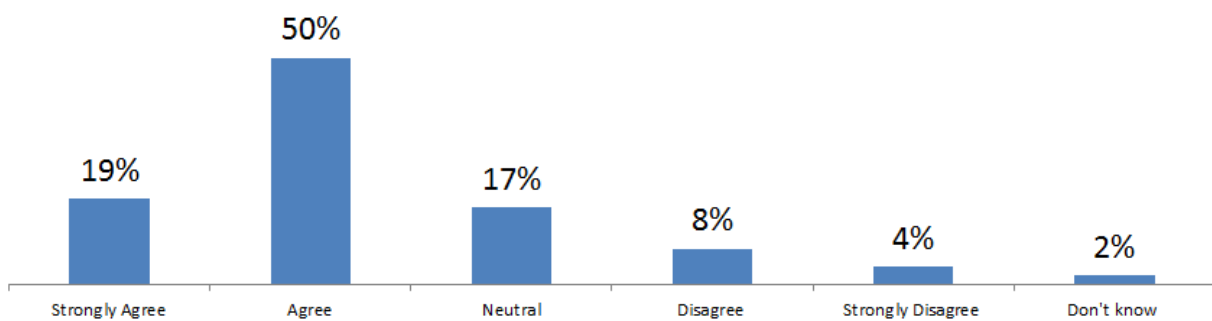
Preferred balance of infrastructure spending by the City?

For the City, what do you think is the right balance between new construction for growth (new rec centres, fire halls, playgrounds, etc) and renewing aging infrastructure (rehab of mature neighbourhoods, existing buildings, parks, etc)?

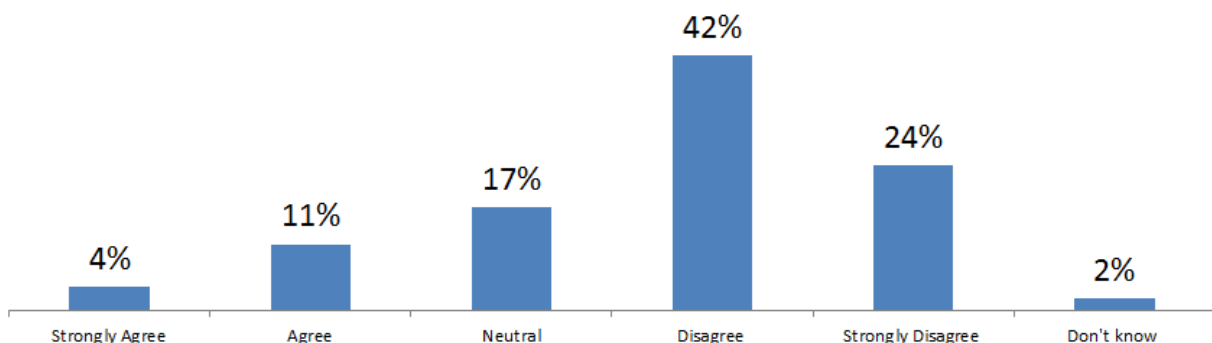


Should the City use Debt?

The City **should continue** to use debt to finance investments some important infrastructure projects to spread the repayment of the initial construction costs over the life the infrastructure is used by residents.



The City **should stop** using debt to finance infrastructure projects and instead save enough property taxes or other revenue every year until enough funds are accumulated to pay for all projects all at once.



Operating Budget and Top Priorities

In your view, what are the most important issue(s) facing our community that should also receive the greatest attention from City Council?

1. LRT Expansion

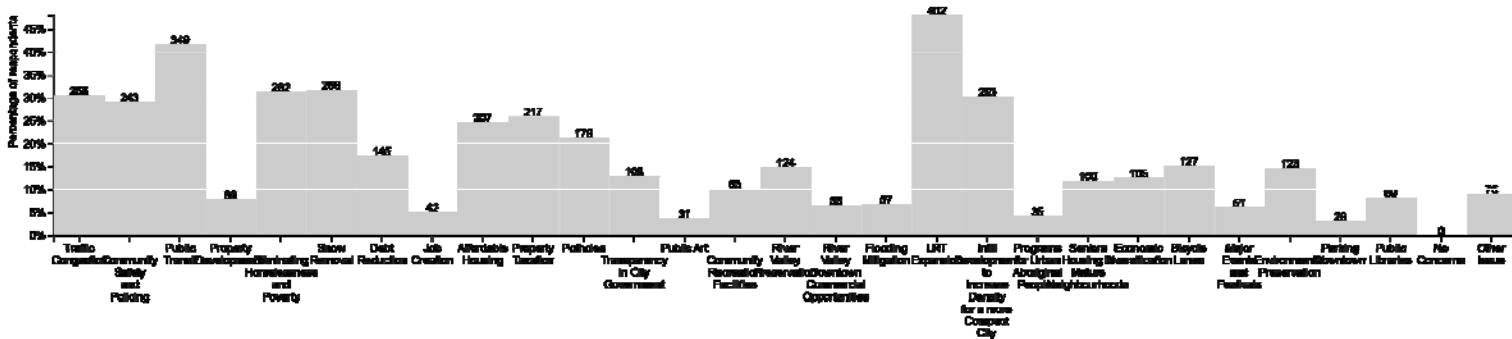
2. Public Transit

3. Snow Removal

4. Homelessness/Poverty

5. Traffic Congestion

6. Infill/Density



Efficiencies and Balancing the Budget

Survey participants were provided information about City revenues and expenditures. The following information about efficiency measures was provided:

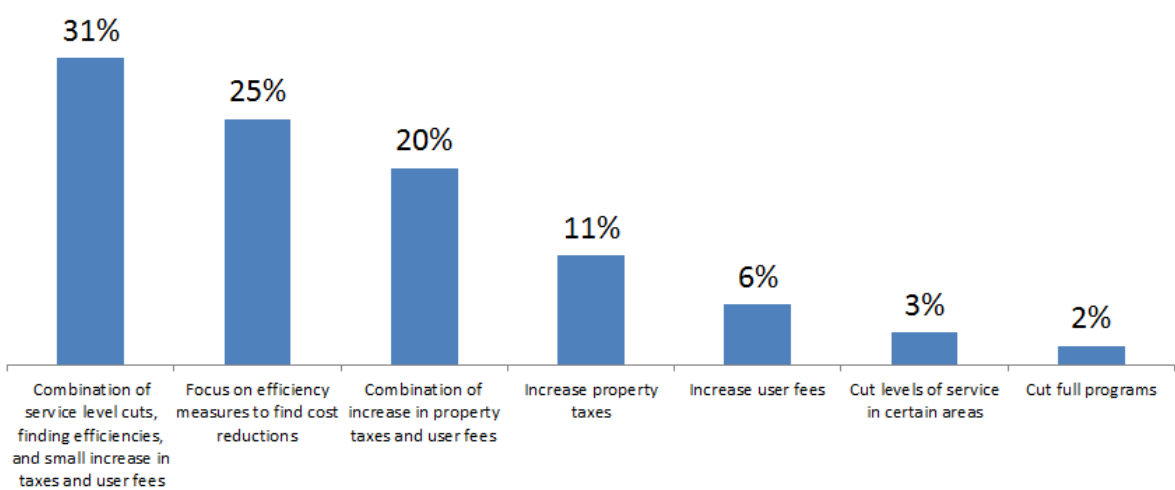
The City has reduced the net Operating Budgets by \$178 million over the past 5 years through efficiency measures. The City has made \$15.6 million in expenditure reductions in the proposed 2015 budget, including \$9 million for City Council to reallocate. The City is formalizing an innovation program to find continuous improvement and even more efficiencies. But the opportunities to save major costs, without cutting programs, are getting harder to find after 5 years of cost cutting measures. At the same time, the cost of operating and maintaining new facilities such as recreation centres, libraries, police and fire stations and a new LRT line have increased operating costs. The City is also expanding services to a growing population and a larger developed area, and inflation for labour, materials and fuel also have an impact.

Participants were asked to increase, decrease or maintain spending levels in 18 service categories. As spending was adjusted, the web tool displayed either a surplus or deficit position.

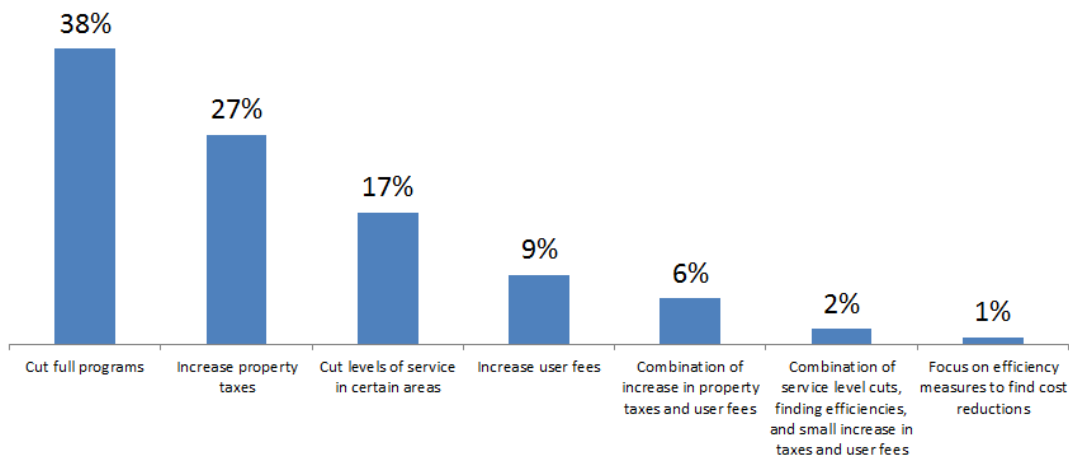
For a DEFICIT, participants were informed the City must balance the budget by decreasing program spending in one or more areas, finding more efficiencies, increasing property taxes, increasing user fees or both taxes and user fees.

How to Balance the Budget?

Which do you prefer the **most**?

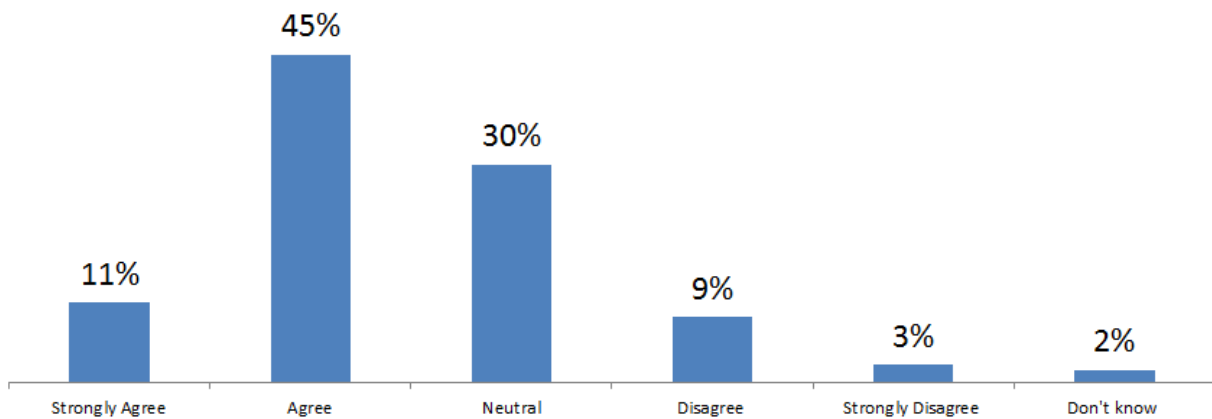


Which do you prefer the **least**?

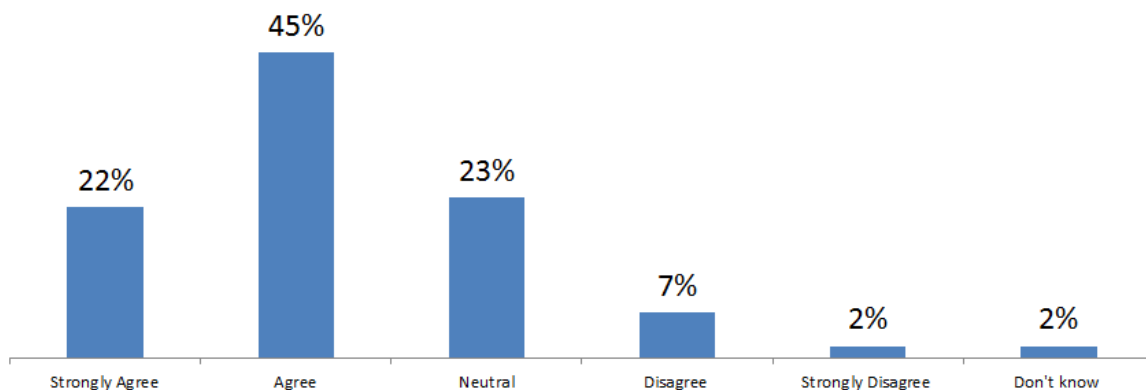


Focus of Innovation Initiative?

The City of Edmonton should launch and focus an innovation program on enhancing services.



The City of Edmonton should launch and focus an innovation program on saving more costs.



Adjusting spending in 18 Service Categories

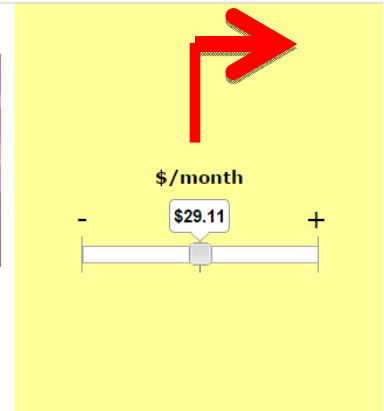
Survey participants were asked to an interactive tool to learn how the City of Edmonton plans to invest tax dollars in all city services – grouped into 18 service categories – and adjust the amounts based on their ratings of importance or need. The categories are 16 tax-supported operations and 2 service areas entirely funded by utility fees.

The City inserted the default value of \$374,500 as the property value for a typical Edmonton household. Participants had the option use the default value or enter their actual assessed property value to see the actual tax per month that goes to each of the 18 service areas.

<i>Service Category – tax supported</i>	<i>Per month tax for typical home</i>
City Governance	\$7.65
Community and Neighbourhood Services	\$6
Community Standards	\$1.97
Corporate Support	\$9.03
Economic Development	\$1.70
Fire Rescue	\$19.84
Neighbourhood Renewal	\$10.81
Parks	\$6.10
Planning, Housing and Buildings	\$10.89
Police Services	\$29.11
Public Library	\$3.96
Public Transit	\$20.18
Recreation Facilities, Programming and Attractions	\$4.38
Summer Road Maintenance	\$7.24
Traffic Management	\$0.28
Winter Road Maintenance	\$5.80
<i>Service Category – utility fee funded</i>	<i>Per month fee for average home</i>
Drainage Services	\$32.03
Waste Management Services	\$40.69
<i>Service Category – non-adjustable</i>	<i>Per month tax for typical home</i>
Debt repayment and capital purchased with current revenue	\$28.92
Corporate expenditures	\$8.15

Police Services

The [Edmonton Police Service](#) provides community policing, crime prevention, victim support, traffic and vehicles, special crime units and initiatives. Under the governance of the Edmonton Police Commission (EPC), the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) focuses its efforts on a four-part policing mandate to prevent crime, enforce the laws, address matters of public safety, and maintain social order – all within a city that continues to experience tremendous growth but still requires the same levels of service for all its citizens. In 2013, EPS answered over 820,000 calls through its 911 line and non-emergency complaint line. EPS reports that as a result of City Council's investment in policing in 2012-13, Edmonton experienced a 13% reduction in violent crime and 38% reduction in property crime. [Learn more](#) about the EPS' mission and values.



In your opinion, what could be done to improve these services provided by Police?

Use the space provided to specify.

Adjusting Spending in 18 Service Categories

Participants were encouraged to read the descriptions, click on links to access more web-based information, and then adjust the spending or maintain the planned level of investment. *(For the full descriptions of service categories, see the Appendix results with full verbatim suggestions for Civic Services Improvements.)*

As participants adjusted the amounts in each broad service category, the display showed the Operating Budget balance increase with a surplus or decrease with a deficit. Through this experience, it was intended for participants to better understand Edmonton's taxes and services, and how their municipal tax dollars should be spent.

Survey respondents were informed the majority of costs for operations are for personnel. Other costs in the operating budget relate to materials, energy, fuel, and technology. If participants think an area needs to be enhanced, they were directed to increase the budgeted amount. This also demonstrates the service area was a priority. Conversely, if a service area is a less of a priority, participants can decrease the budget amount in favour of focus in other areas.

Question: Thinking about the operations for civic services provided by the City of Edmonton, would you increase funding of the service, decrease funding of the service or keep the funding the same?

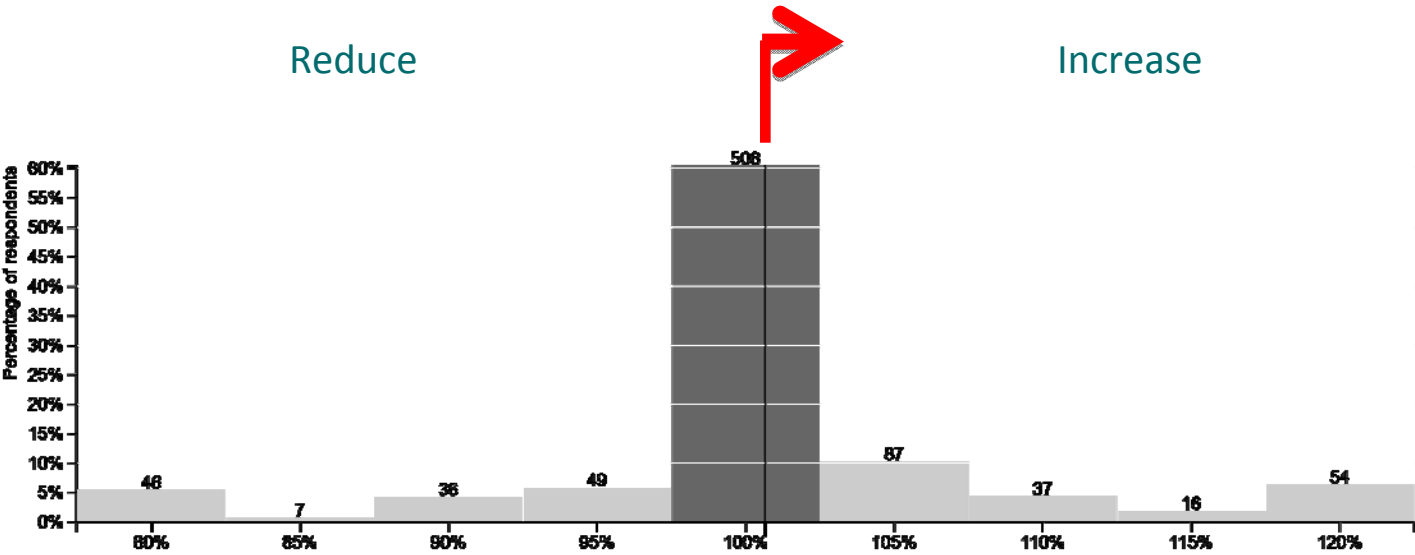
The following display of results uses a green or red arrow to convey the average of all responses.

A **green** arrow pointing left suggests the average of all respondents is to decrease spending on the category, thereby producing a savings.

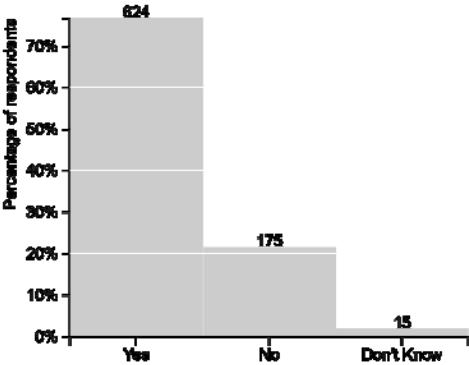
A **red** arrow pointing right suggests the average of all respondents is to increase spending on the category, producing a deficit.

A **blue** check in the centre represents an average of maintaining planned spending.

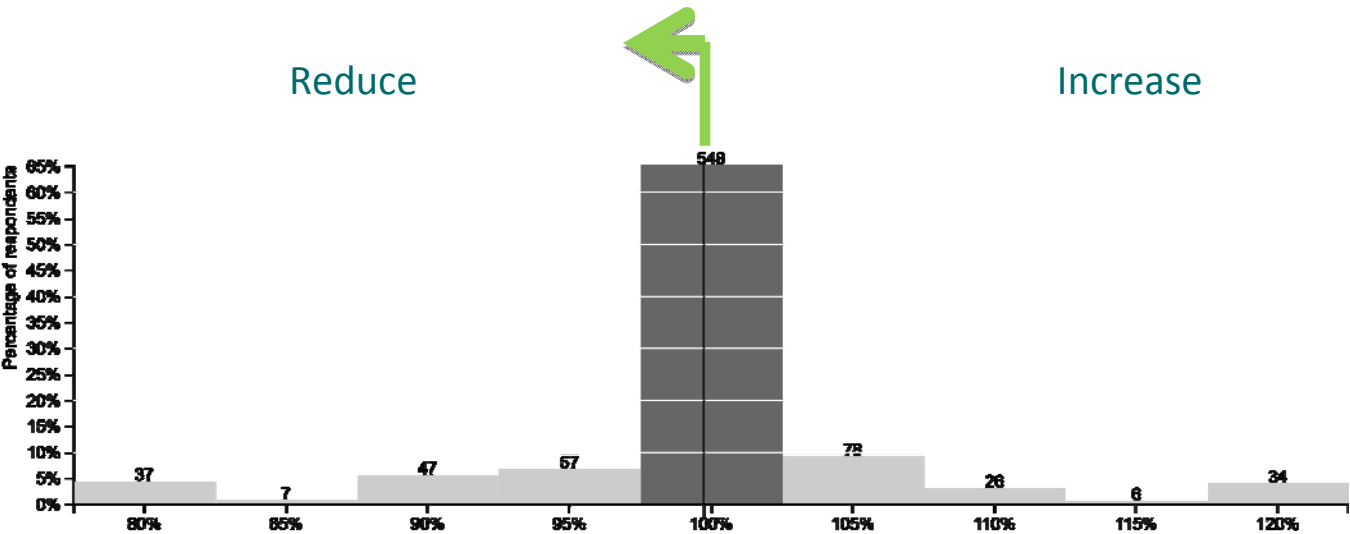
Recreation, Programming, Attractions



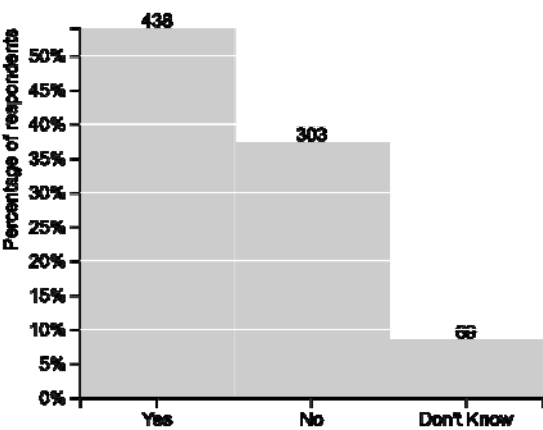
Used in past 12 months?



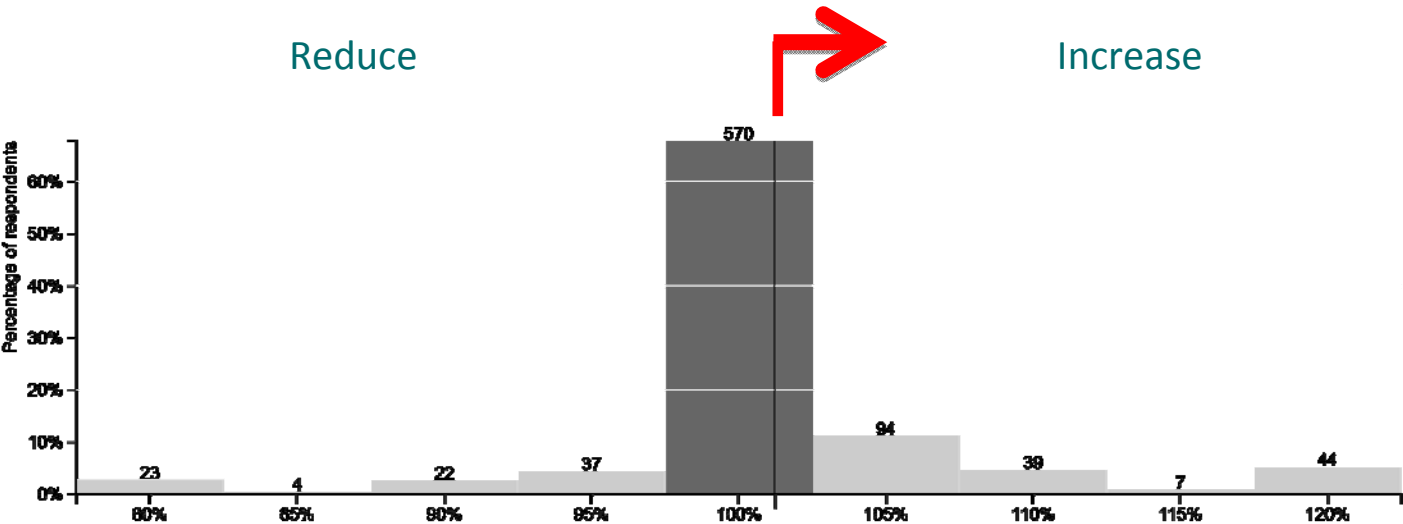
Planning, Housing, Buildings



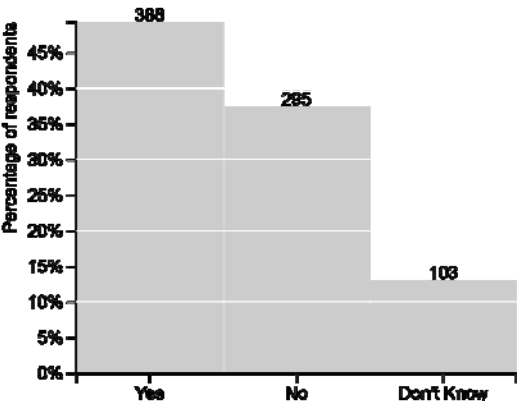
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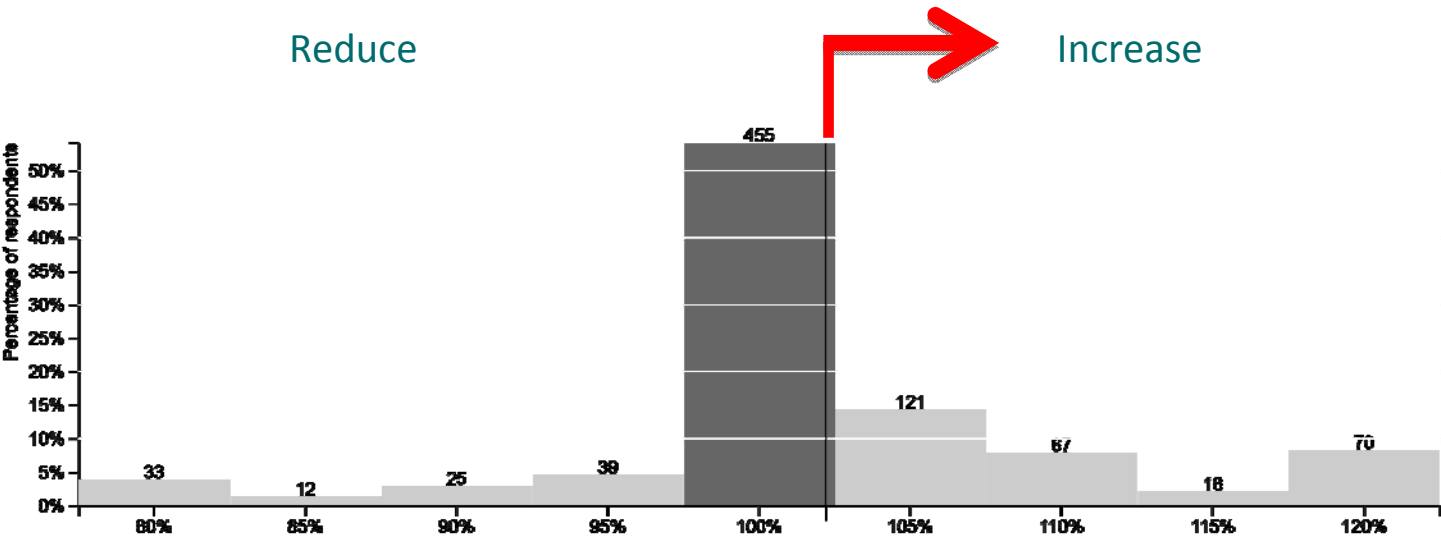
Neighbourhood Renewal



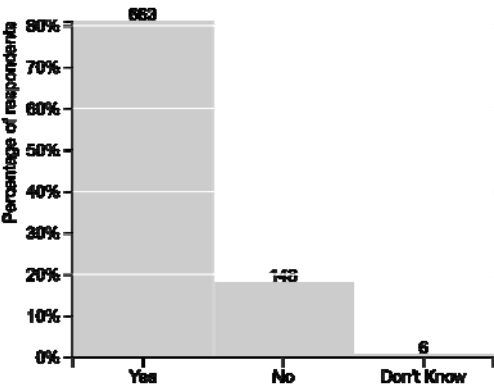
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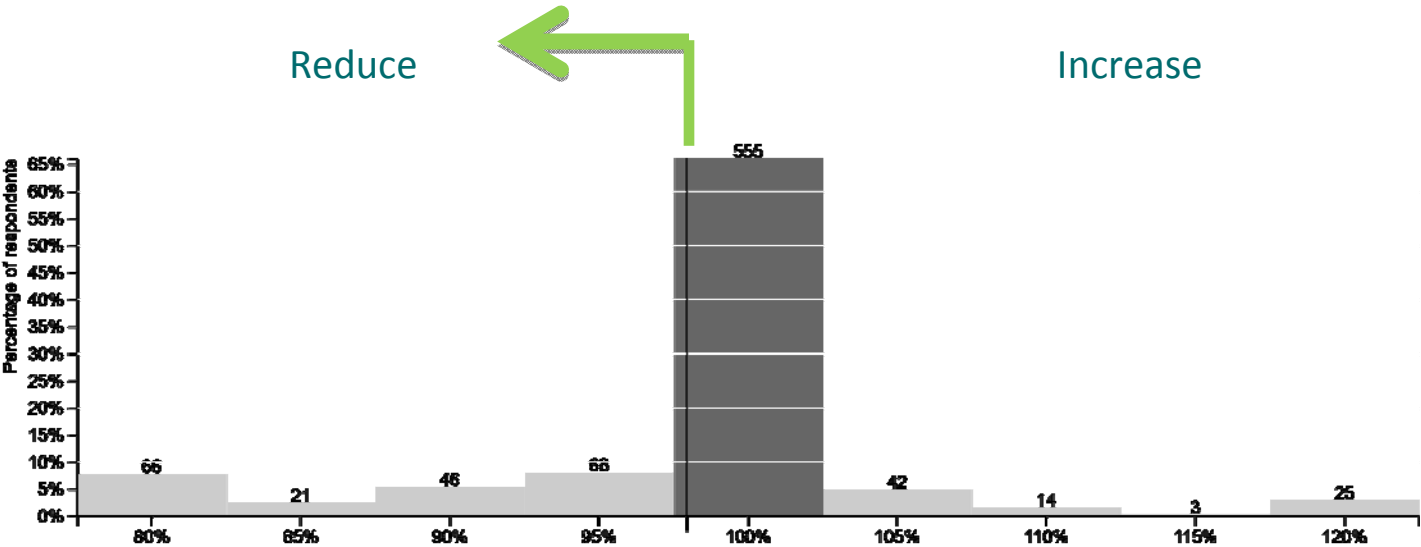
Public Transit



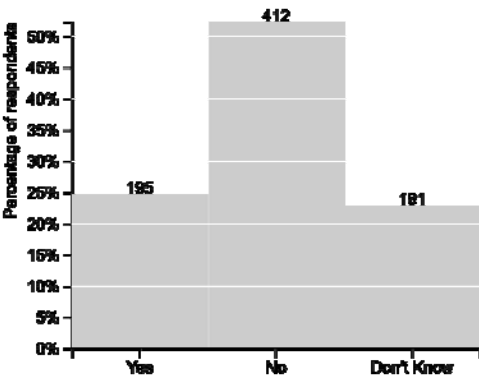
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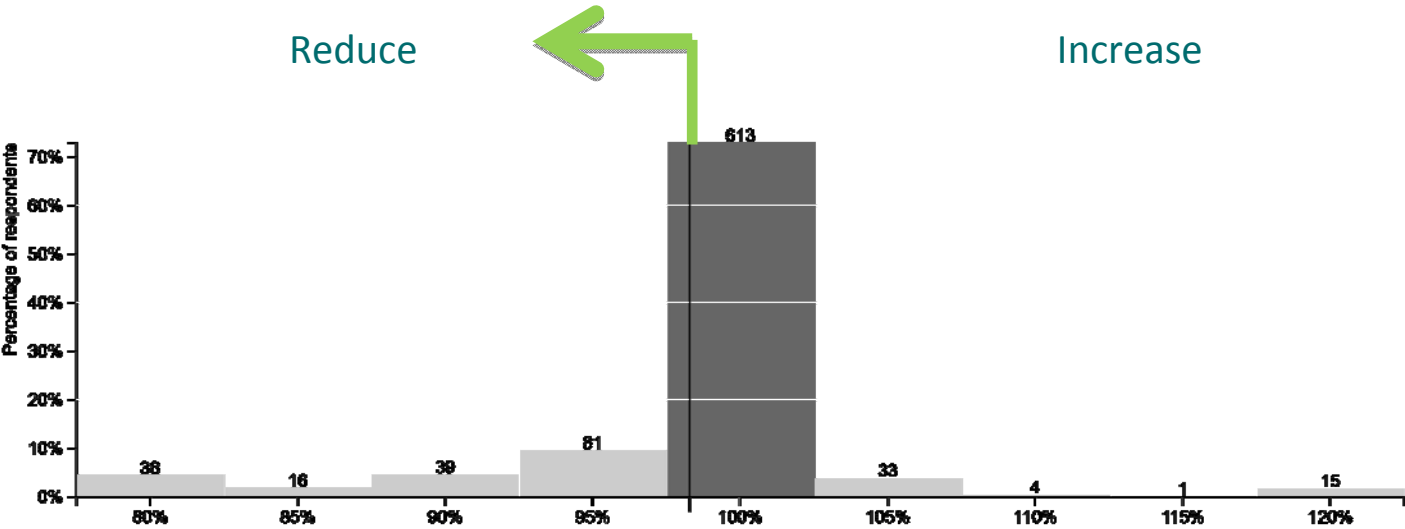
Economic Development



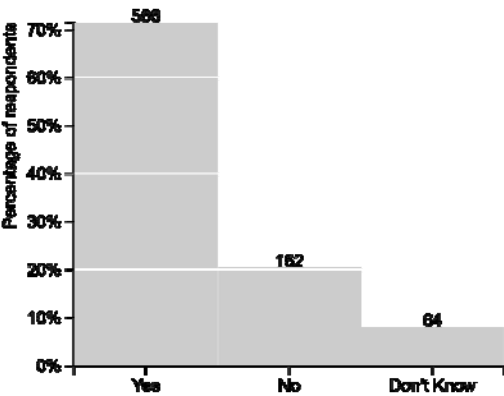
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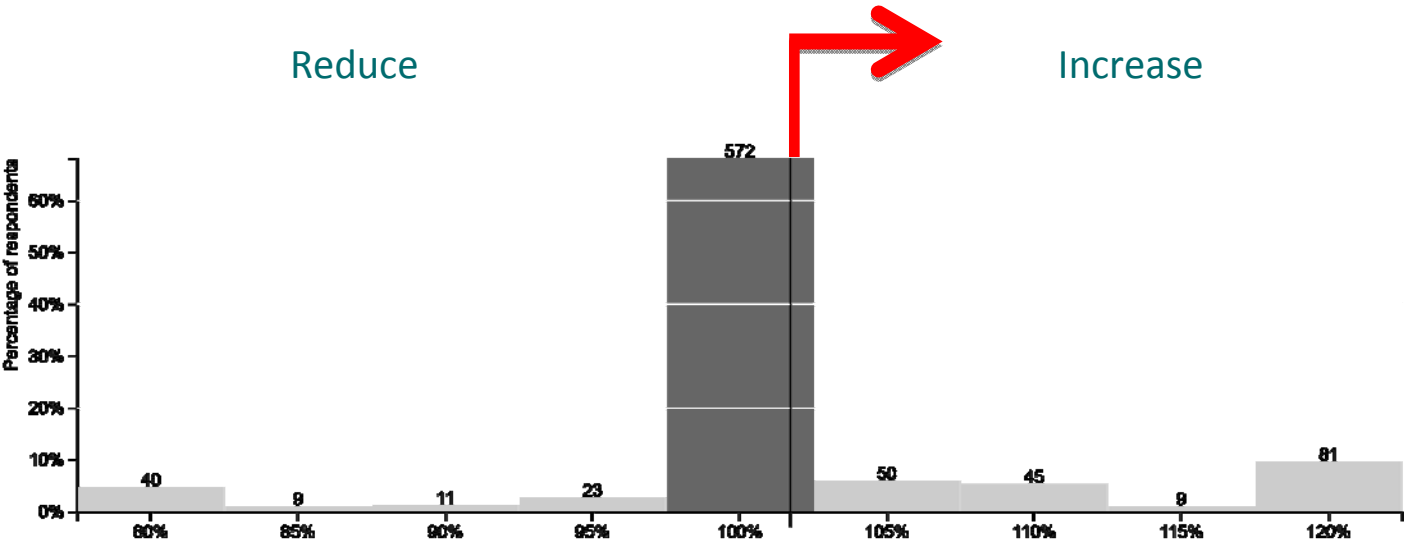
Corporate Support



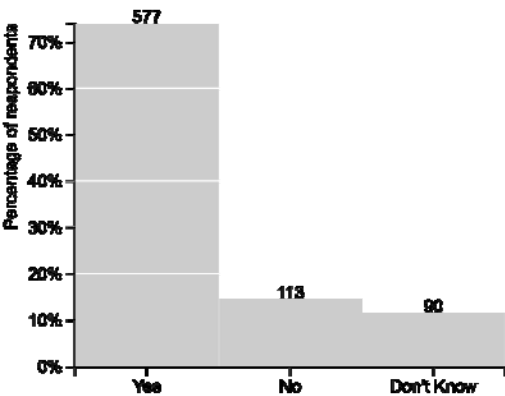
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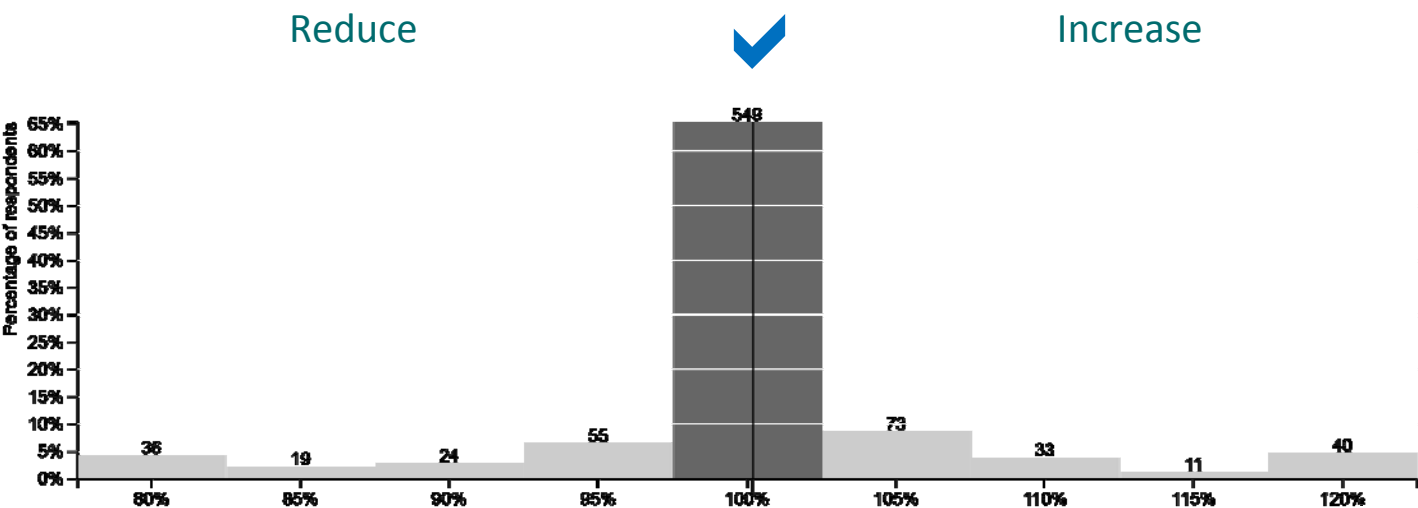
Traffic Management



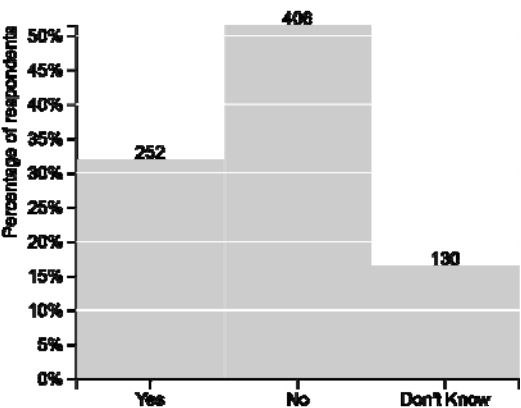
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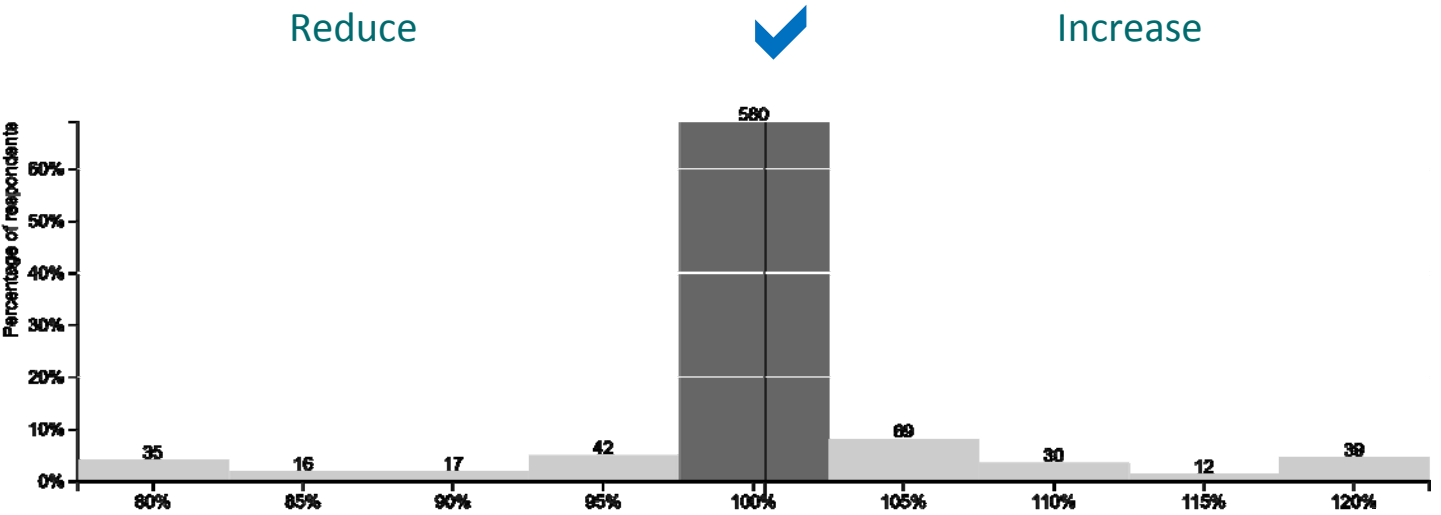
Community and Neighbourhood Services



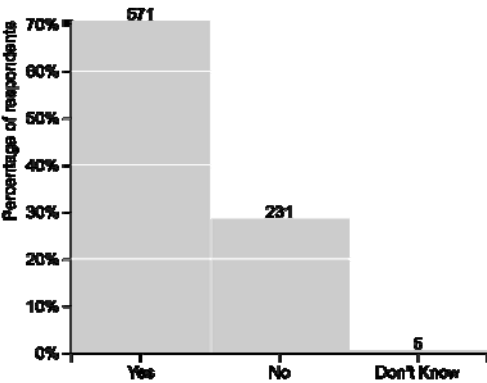
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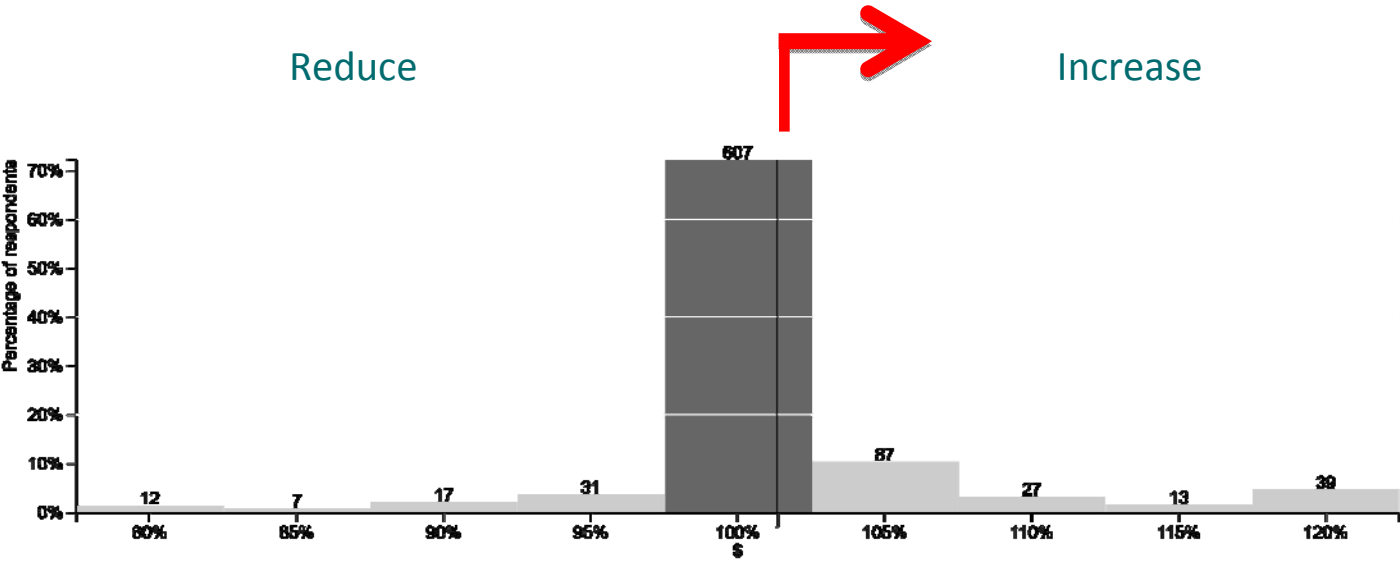
Public Library



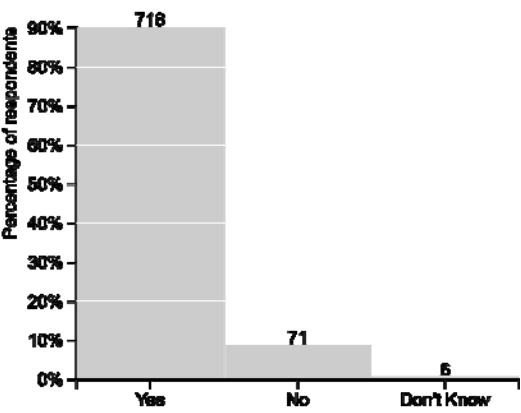
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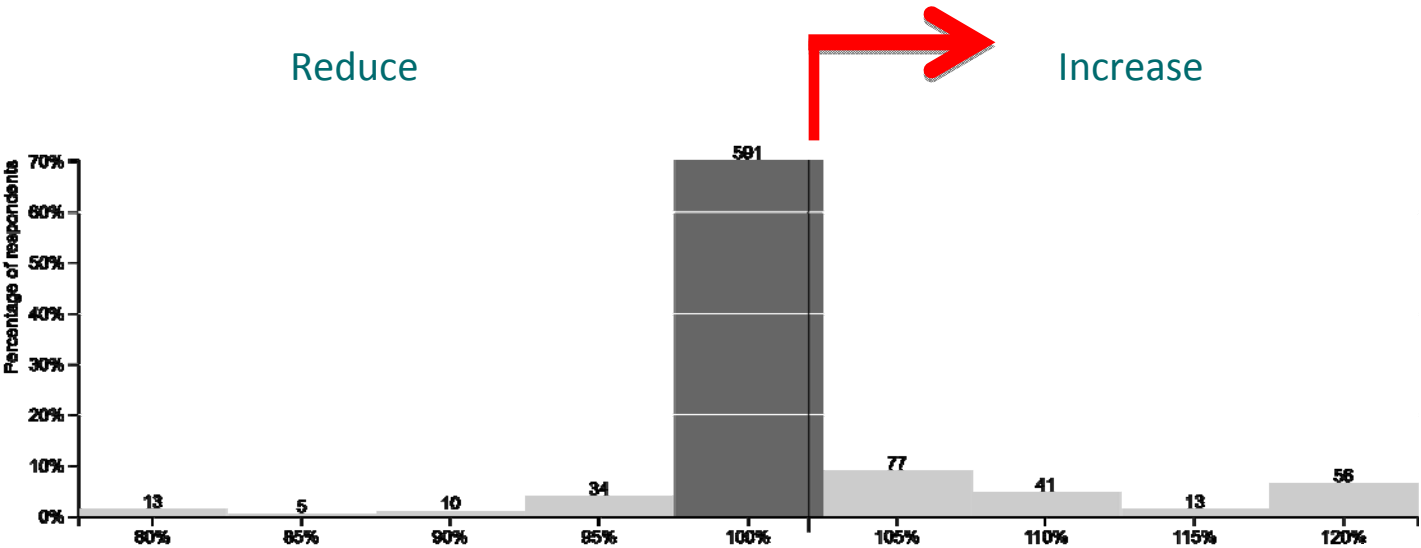
Parks



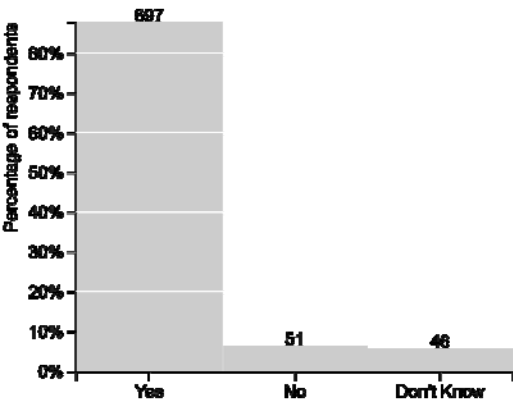
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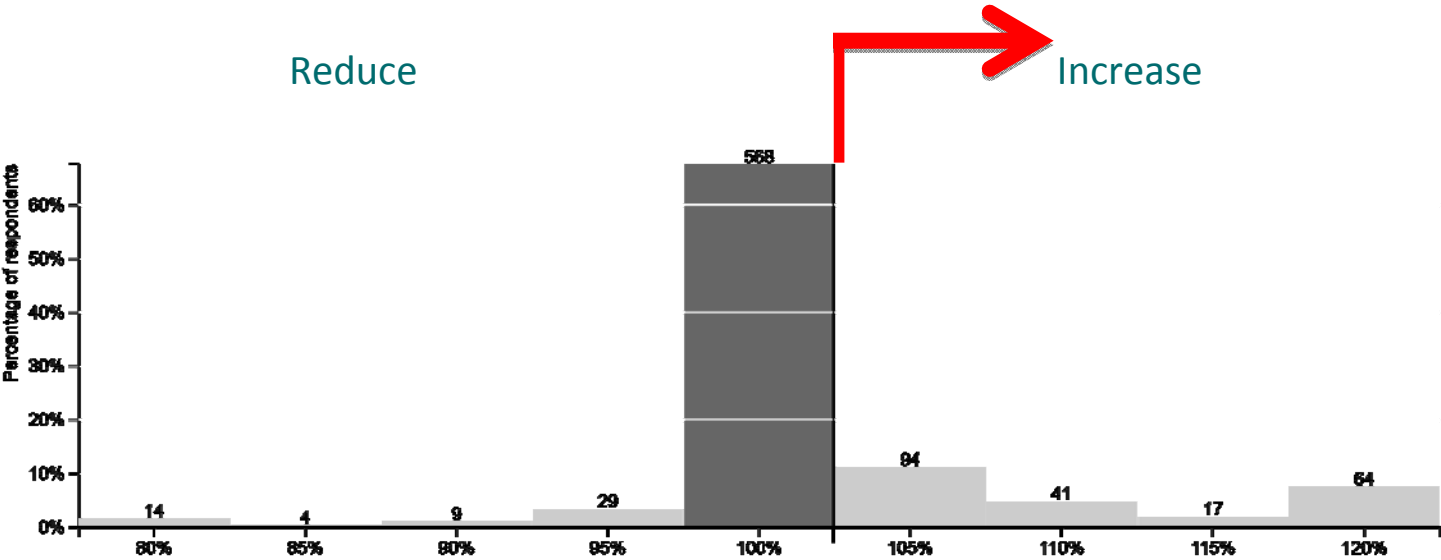
Summer Road Maintenance



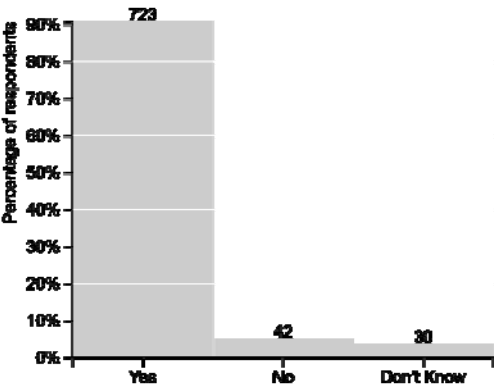
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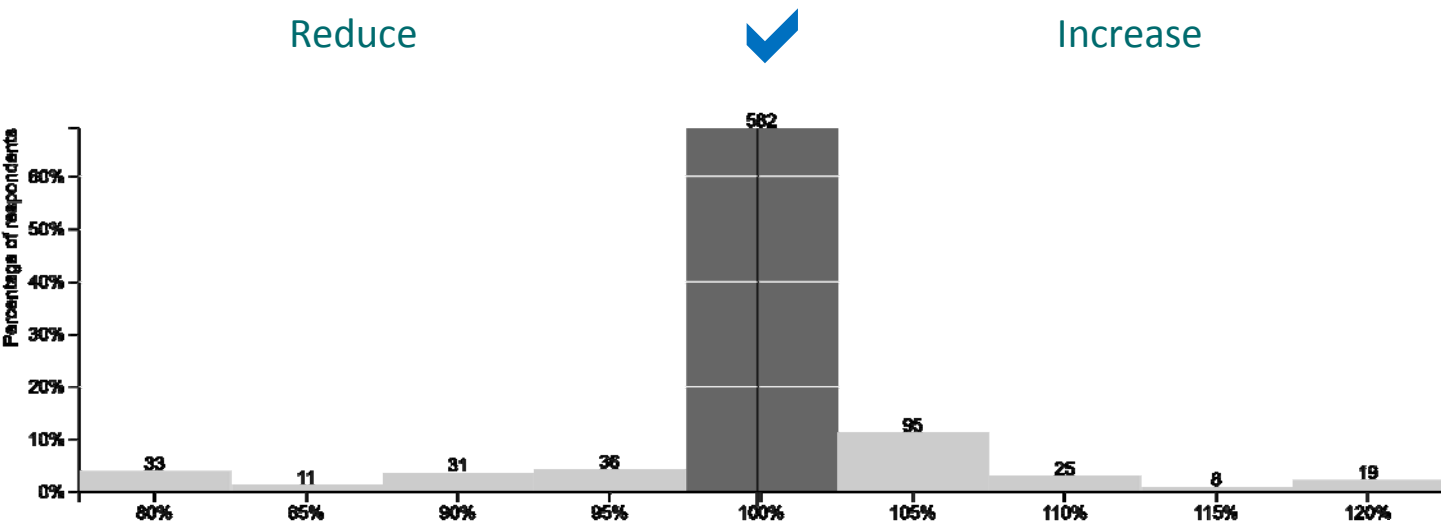
Winter Road Maintenance



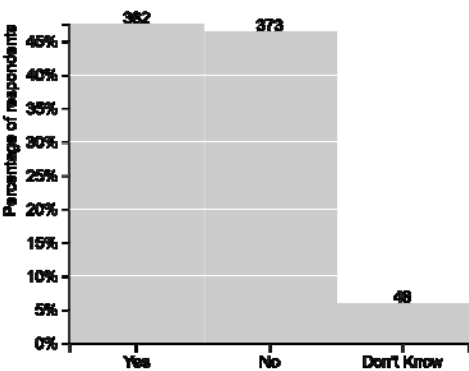
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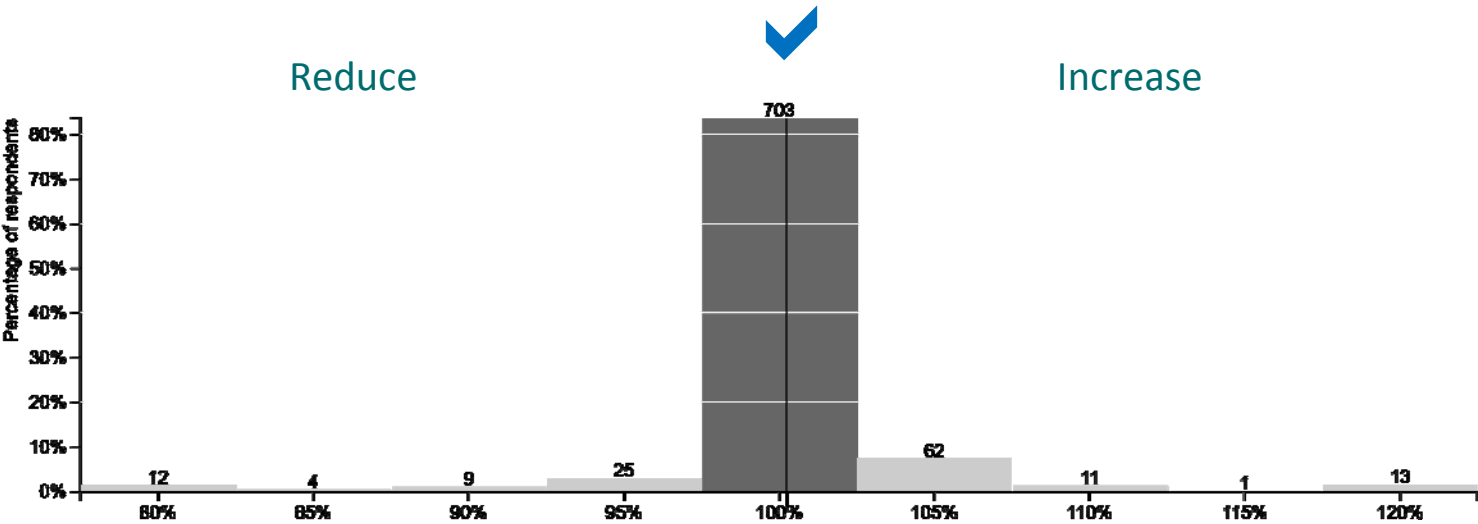
Police Services



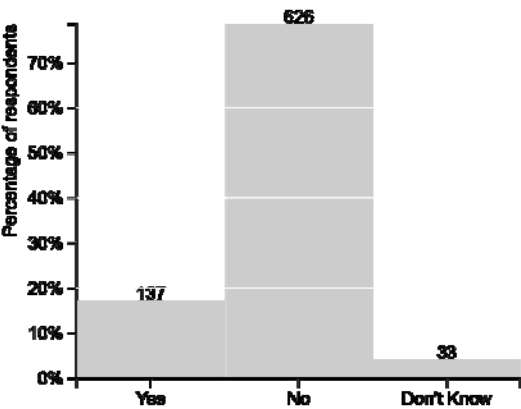
Used in past 12 months?



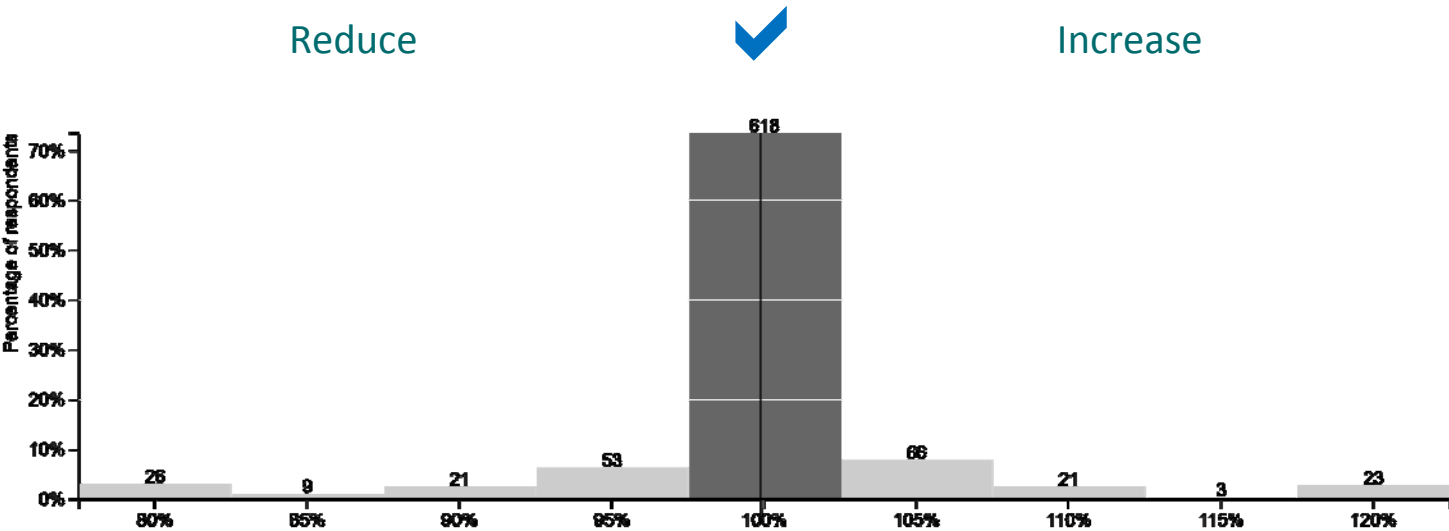
Fire Rescue Services



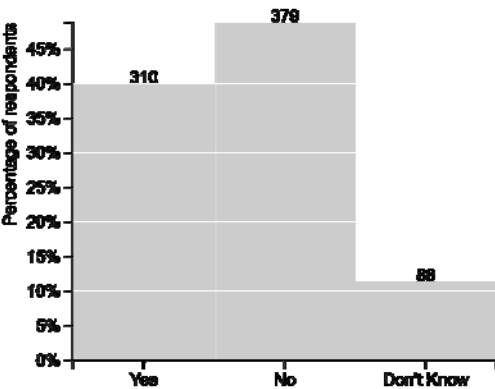
Used in past 12 months?



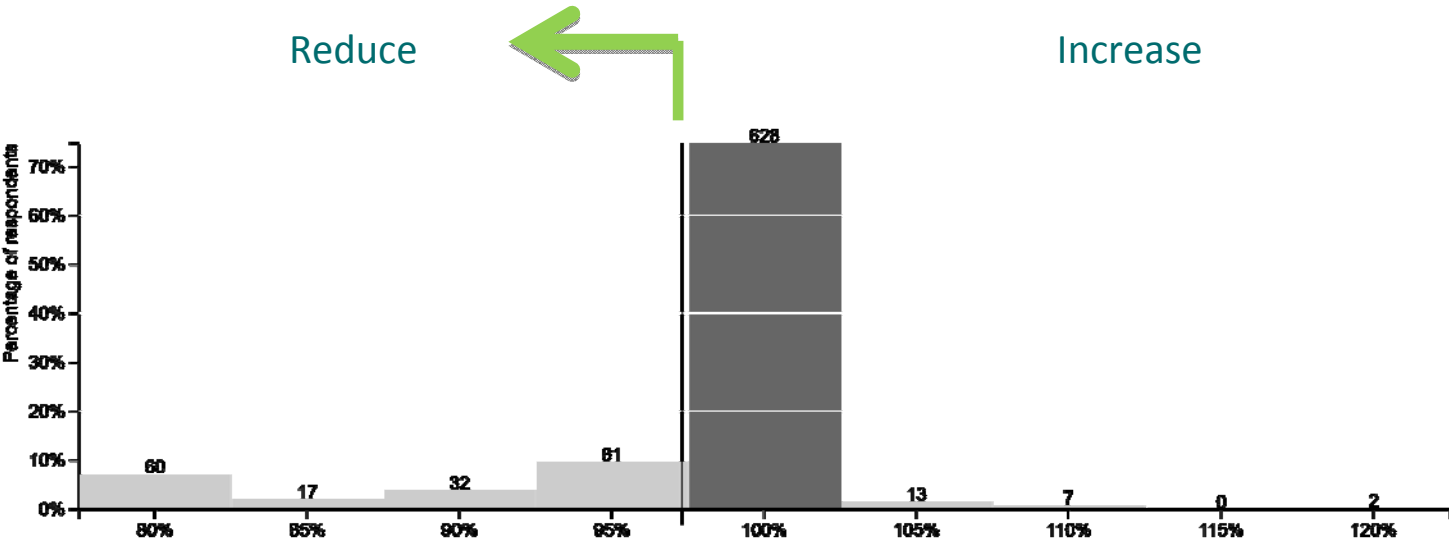
Community Standards



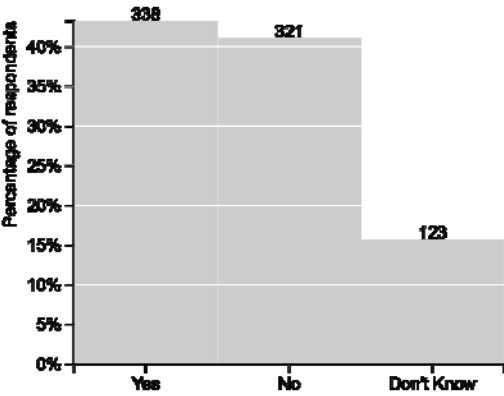
Used in past 12 months?



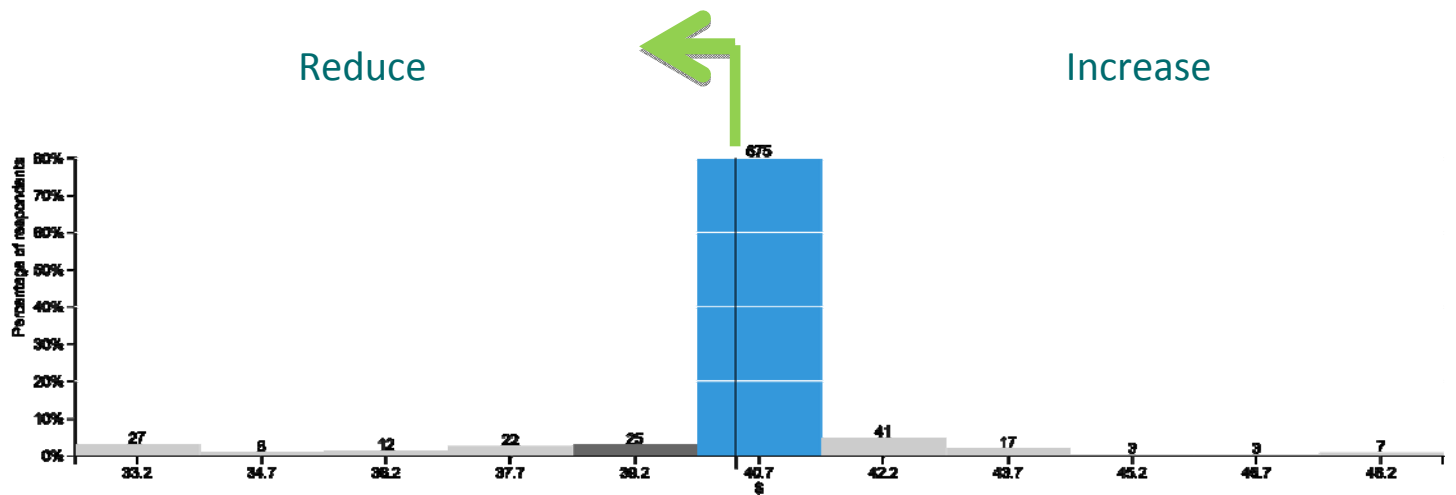
Governance



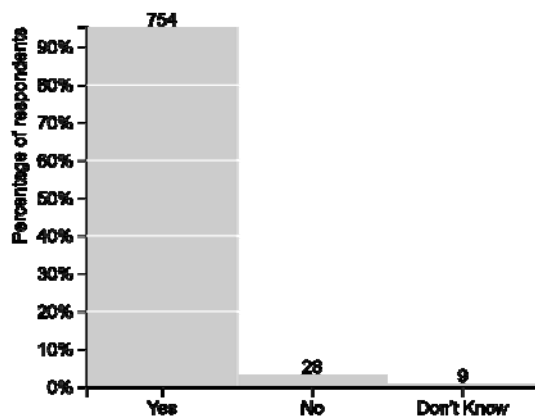
Used in past 12 months?



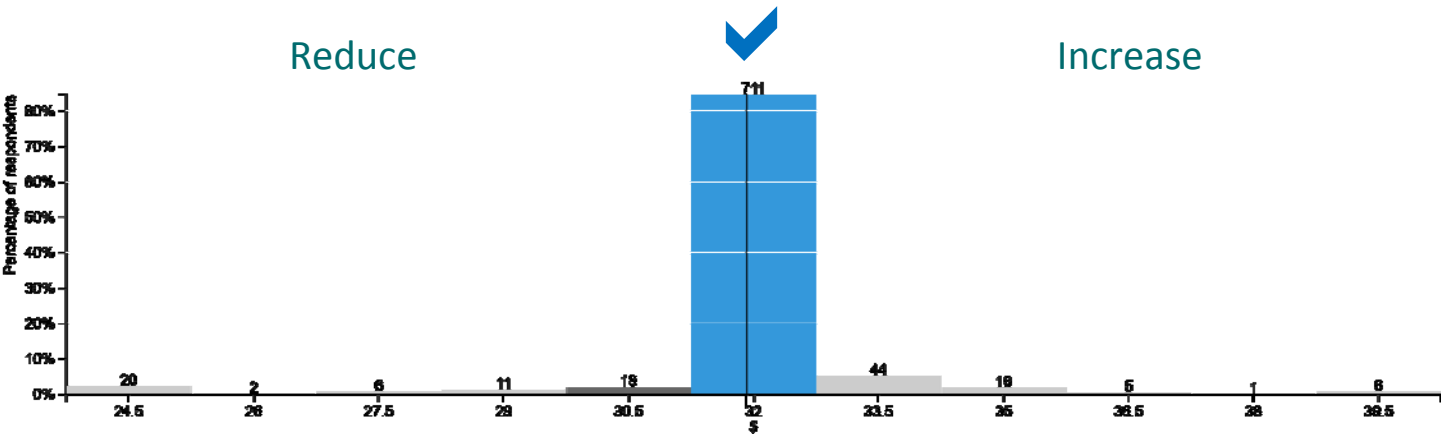
Waste Management



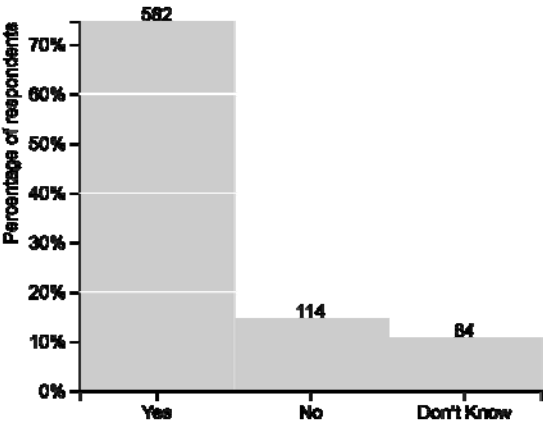
Used in past 12 months?



Drainage Services



Used in past 12 months?



Feedback on Civic Services

The City received hundreds of suggestions to improve each of the 18 service categories from the 840 respondents.

See Appendix summary of Improvements to Civic Services for verbatim responses in each category.

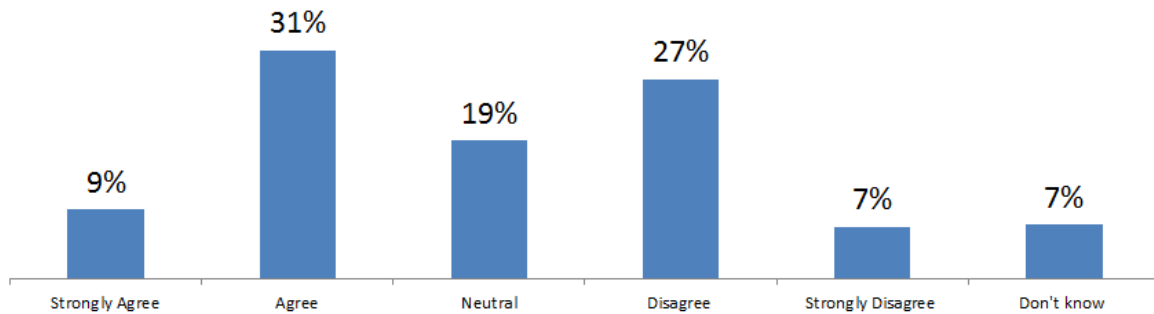
Administration is to review these comments as part of business plan development. The comments also help the City gauge awareness and understanding of civic programs, which can assist in planning communications efforts.

What could be done to improve the services of Traffic Management?

traffic	217 (4%)
radar	150 (3%)
photo	149 (3%)
lights	115 (2%)
city	86 (1%)
light	75 (1%)
speed	74 (1%)
safety	61 (1%)
people	58 (1%)
street	55 (1%)

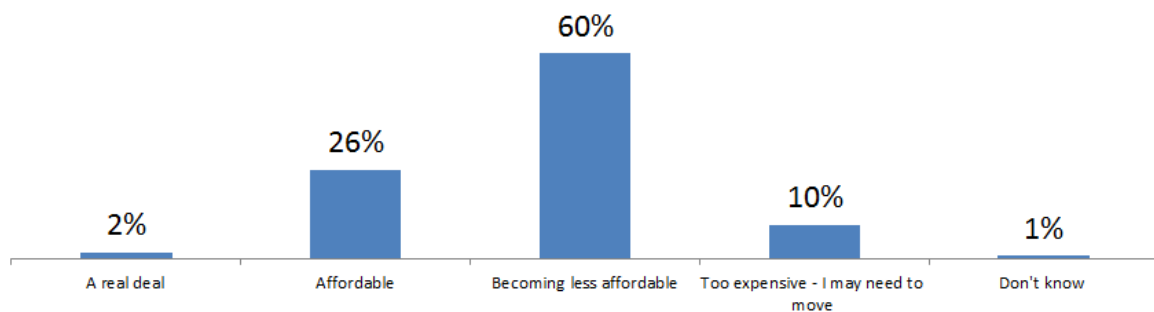
Adequate Revenue?

The City of Edmonton has adequate sources of revenue to deliver the services and infrastructure Edmontonians need.



Household Costs

Overall, how affordable are all household costs in Edmonton?



Would you change amount of taxes collected by three orders of government?

Survey participants were provided information about where the average Edmonton household – with two income earners – pays taxes.

Government of Canada

Income tax, GST, gas tax, etc. account for on average 66% of an Edmonton household's taxes.

Government of Alberta

Income tax, property tax for education, etc. account for on average 28% of an Edmonton household's taxes.

City of Edmonton

Property tax account for on average 6% of an Edmonton household's taxes.

Participants were asked to review the allocation of a typical Edmonton household’s taxes, and adjust if they believe that is necessary.

